

Abraham Lincoln's Family

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Abraham Lincoln is a very distinguished figure in American history. Every school child learns of him and how he freed the slaves and also of his assassination on April 14, 1865. However, in all his political stardom, Abe's personal life is somewhat shadowed. Not many people know of his ancestry or the family that he and his wife Mary Todd created. There is much more to be learned about this fascinating figure just by studying the people who supported him and surrounded him throughout his life.

Lincoln himself had some idea of his heritage but it was vague. He never wrote about his mother's side and he only knew about two generations before his father. "My grandfather went from Rockingham country in Virginia to Kentucky, in about 1782; and, two years afterwards, was assassinated by the Indians," Lincoln wrote in a letter to another relative. "We have a vague tradition, that my great-grandfather went from Pennsylvania to Virginia; and that he was a Quaker," he wrote in the same letter. This was all that Lincoln himself had been told about his heritage.

Historians have since determined that Lincoln was in fact correct about his Quaker ancestry, but his earlier ancestors were New England Puritans. The first ancestor to come to America was Samuel Lincoln, who came before 1640 as part of the great Puritan Migration of the 1630s. Nothing is known about his mother's side.

Abe's parents were Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks. They were married on June 12, 1806. Following the marriage, they moved to a farm in Hardin County, Kentucky, and in 1807, birthed a daughter, Sarah. In 1809, Abe was born in a log cabin

that his father had built. On October 5, 1818, Abe's mother, Nancy, died of a sickness caused by drinking poisoned milk. Young Abe recalled helping to carve the pegs for the coffin. Thomas went on to remarry and die in 1851 at the age of 73. Abe was not close to him and did not attend the funeral. Abe eventually married Mary Ann Todd.

Mary Ann Todd was born December 13, 1818, in Kentucky. She was the daughter of Eliza Parker and Robert Smith Todd and she was one of seven children. In 1839 she moved to Springfield and became very popular in society. Prior to dating Abe, she dated the man who would come to be his archrival, Stephen A. Douglas. She and Abe were married on November 4, 1842, and settled in to begin a family.

On August 1, 1843, a son was born to Mary and Abe. They named him Robert Todd after Mary's father. He went to a private school in his younger years and eventually attended Harvard Law School for a short time. Following his father's death, he took courses at the University of Chicago (although not the school of that name today) and eventually became a lawyer. He married in 1868 and the couple had three children. He continued to live happily until his death in 1926 at the age of 82.

The Lincoln's second child, Edward Baker Lincoln, was born on March 10, 1846. He was named for Edward Baker a friend of Abraham's. Eddie was said to be an affectionate and tenderhearted little boy. After a short illness, Eddie died on February 1, 1850. He was not yet 4 years old.

On December 21, 1850, the Lincoln's third son, William Wallace was born. William was nicknamed "Willie" for short. He was named for Dr. William Wallace, the husband of Frances Todd, a sister of Mary Todd. Willie loved learning, wrote poetry, excelled in math, and was said to be bright and sweet natured. Many believed that

William was actually Abraham's favorite child. The two were quite close and it has been said that they could often be seen walking together holding hands. On February 20, 1862, at just 11 years old, Willie died in the White House. Both parents painfully mourned the death. Mary never totally recovered from the loss of her son.

On April 4, 1853, the Lincoln's fourth and final child was born. He was named Thomas Lincoln after Abraham's father. Thomas received the nickname "Tad" because, as a baby, he looked like a tadpole. As a boy Tad was a high-spirited, often difficult, undisciplined prankster. At age 12, Tad was nearly illiterate even though he had tutors while in the White House. He later attended school in Chicago and Europe. After his father was assassinated Tad was especially close to his mother. They lived and traveled in Europe together and Tad lovingly looked after his mother. They returned to the United States after a 2 ½ year absence. Shortly after arriving in Chicago in 1871, Tad became desperately ill. He died on July 15, 1871. Tad was 18 years old. Once again, Mary was overcome with grief with the loss of yet another child.

It is imperative to realize that Lincoln was not only a president but also a son, husband, and father. One can learn more about him just by studying his family life. No matter the circumstances, one statement remains true: Lincoln would have never been the man he was without the love and support of his family. [From Abraham Lincoln Research Site, "Abraham Lincoln's Parents,"

<<http://home.att.net/~rjnorton/Lincoln81.html>> (Oct. 14, 2006); Abraham Lincoln

Research Site, "Mary Todd Lincoln," <<http://home.att.net/~rjnorton/Lincoln76.html>>

(Oct. 14, 2006); Abraham Lincoln Research Site, "Robert Todd Lincoln,"

<<http://home.att.net/~rjnorton/Lincoln66.html>> (Oct. 15, 2006); MSN Encarta, "Abraham

Lincoln,” <http://Encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761577113/Lincoln_Abraham.html>
(Oct. 13, 2006); Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia*; Springfield
Illinois, “Mary Todd Lincoln And The Children,” <<http://www.topologies.net/mary-lincoln.htm>> (Oct. 15, 2006); and Ida M. Tarbell, *Abraham Lincoln And His Ancestors*.]